

WHY THE ASCENSION?

Notes on Message by Willis E. Bishop
at the Good Samaritan Care Center
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Text: Acts 1:1-11

Our Lord's work here on Earth that required His physical presence, such as the crucifixion and resurrection, was now finished. There follows a miracle almost as great as His resurrection: His bodily ascension back into Heaven.

Because of this, a number of wonderful things took place.

I. The ascension resulted in a special ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was active in Old Testament times, but our Lord had promised John 16:7: "...if I do not go away, the Advocate [i.e., the Holy Spirit] will not come to you. But if I depart I will send Him to you."

Then in Acts 1:5 He says, "You shall be baptized by the Holy Spirit not many days from now." And that's the story of Pentecost in Acts 2.

According to I Cor. 12:12,13, all believers since then are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ -- the invisible Church. That, and only that, is the meaning of Spirit baptism, and it began after and as the result of the ascension of our Lord.

Yes, Christ's ascension resulted in a special ministry of the Holy Spirit.

II. The ascension began our Lord's priestly ministry.

Our Lord is the only person in Scripture to hold the three offices: prophet - priest - king.

During our Lord's earthly ministry He was a prophet.

After feeding the five thousand - John 6:14: the men said, "This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world."

In Rev. 19:16 we read that as our Lord returns from Heaven to Earth in the future, He has "on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

When did His priesthood begin? "If He were on Earth He would not be a priest." Heb. 8:4.

Paul writes in Heb. 4:14-16: "We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens - Jesus, the Son of God.... Let us therefore come with free speech to the throne of grace."

So today we have the wonderful work of our Lord as priest on behalf of all our needs. The ascension began that work.

III. The ascension enables our Lord to prepare for us a place.

In John 14:2, 3a, our Lord said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places. ... I go to prepare for you a place...."

With Luther we must say, "Be careful of speculation." There probably are many preparations about which we have no information.

A humble suggestion of one change:

Rev. 11:19 - there is a temple in Heaven
Rev. 21:22 - there is no temple in Heaven

Let us be assured of wonderful preparations for the believer because our Lord said so!

IV. The ascension guarantees our Lord's return for us.

Our Lord said in John 14:3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself. ..."

Acts 1:11: "This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

In Titus 2:13 this return is called the "blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

Because our Lord's return could occur at any moment it is a "blessed hope," and the possibility of His soon coming should stimulate us live now so as not to be ashamed at His coming.

In conclusion, the ascension has given to us (1) a special ministry of the Holy Spirit, (2) a present priestly ministry of our Lord on our behalf, (3) the promise of a prepared place in Heaven for us, and (4) a blessed purifying hope of the possible soon return of our Lord.

If the Christ who died had stopped at the cross
His work had been incomplete.
If the Christ that was buried had stayed in the tomb
He had only known defeat.
But the way of the cross never stops at the cross,
And the way of the tomb leads on
To victorious grace in the heavenly place
Where the risen Lord has gone. --Annie Johnson Flint

The Orthodox Collect prayer for Ascension Day [with a slight addition]: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thy only begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell [ever thankful for all that the ascension means to us now and forever]. We pray in the name of Him who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

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